THE

CONFESSIONAL,

OR AN

EXPOSITION OF THE DOCTRINE

OF

AURICULAR CONFESSION,

AS TAUGHT IN

THE STANDARDS OF THE ROMISH CHURCH.

BY JOSEPH F. BERG,
Pastor of the First Germ. Ref. Church, Philad.

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PREFACE.

The substance of this little volume is contained in the discourse on Auricular Confession, published in my Lectures on Romanism. The first edition being exhausted, that sermon is reprinted with the addition of extracts from Peter Dens' System of Theology, which comes fresh from the Arch-Episcopal press, at Mechlin, as lately as the year 1838. Public attention has recently been directed to the subject of Romanism with an eagerness of investigation hitherto unknown in this city, and frequent inquiry has been made concerning that portion of Peter Dens' System

which relates to Auricular Confession. I have made such extracts as I thought most pertinent; and have endeavoured to give a fair, and, wherever the idiom would permit, a literal translation of the passages, which will be found on these pages.

Dens' System of Theology is notoriously a standard work in use in Roman Catholic Seminaries; and, if any proof were wanting, no farther evidence could be desired than may be furnished by a perusal of the title page of the edition which lies before me. It is possible, however, that this may be denied; for Mr. Hughes, it is said, lately challenged any Protestant minister or layman to produce a single case in which the Papists had put Protestants to death, and in open court offered to lay a wager of $1000 to that effect!!! And the same individual

stood up before the New York Common Council, and a multitude of Popish and Protestant clergy, and actually denied the authority of the Rhemish Testament, though it has been published and kept up, edition after edition, for two hundred and fifty-nine years, and has never been disapproved or inserted on the Index Prohibitory by any Pope, or censor of the Pope. And still more lately, the bull of the Philadelphia bishop pronounced over the late priest, Mr. Hogan, has been denied, though there are those living who well remember when that gentleman was cursed with "bell, book and candle!"

With these recent occurrences before me, I shall not be surprised, if Peter Dens should fall into sudden disrepute with some of his most ardent admirers; and if only this result is gained, I shall be amply

rewarded for the pains I have taken to expose a few of the atrocious doctrines which abound in his system of iniquity.

When attempts are made to arrest the discussion of the tendencies of Romanism by threats and acts of violence, it is no time for Protestant ministers to be silent, or to shrink from bearing bold and faithful testimony against the monstrous impieties of that system of delusion, which has done more to ruin souls than any other craft which Satan has ever devised. That God may open the eyes of many of our Roman Catholic brethren, both priests and laymen, is my heart's desire and prayer. God is my witness that the worst I wish them is, that they may come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved.

J. F. B.

Philad. Feb. 19, 1841.

AURICULAR CONFESSION.

The tyranny which the Popish church exercises over the consciences and souls of men, becomes more apparent the further we proceed in our investigation of its principles. But in nothing is the spiritual despotism of the Man of Sin more evident than in the usurpation of the power to forgive sins. Before I proceed to examine the proofs offered in the Grounds of Catholic Doctrine, in support of this prerogative, which is most unjustly and impudently claimed by Romish priests, it will be necessary to state the doctrine, and the *whole* doctrine, as it is taught in the standards of their church. The subject of auricular confession, or confession in the ear of a priest, is intimately connected with

that of penance, which is one of the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic church. We are told in the Grounds of Cath. Doct., p. 34, that the confession of sins, with a sincere repentance, and the priest's absolution, constitute the sacrament of penance.

I will read the decrees of the Council of Trent in relation to this subject.

"The holy Council teaches, that the form of the sacrament, wherein its power chiefly lies, resides in the words of the minister, 'I absolve thee from thy sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' To which words certain prayers are added, by a laudable custom of holy church, &c.

"The universal church has always understood that a full confession of sins was instituted by the Lord as a part of the sacrament of penance, now explained, and that it is necessary, by divine appointment, for all who sin after baptism: because our Lord Jesus Christ. when he was about to

ascend from earth to heaven, left his priests in his place, as presidents and judges, to whom all mortal offences, into which the faithful might fall, should be submitted, that they might pronounce sentence of remission or retention of sins, by the power of the keys. For it is plain that the priests cannot sustain the office of judge, if the cause be unknown to them, nor inflict equitable punishments if sins are only confessed in general, and not minutely and individually described. For this reason it follows that penitents are bound to rehearse in confession all mortal sins, of which, after diligent examination of themselves, they are conscious, even though they be of the *most secret kind*, and only committed against the two last precepts of the decalogue, which sometimes do more grievously wound souls, and are more perilous than those which are open and manifest. For venial offences, by which we are not excluded from the grace of God, and into which

we so frequently fall, may be concealed without fault, and expiated in many other ways, although, as the pious custom of many demonstrates, they may be mentioned in confession very properly and usefully, and without any presumption.

* * * *

"The Council further teaches that *even those priests, who are living in mortal sin, exercise the function of forgiving sins, as the ministers of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit conferred upon them in ordination;* and that those who contend that *wicked priests* have not this power, hold *very erroneous* sentiments. Again; though the priest's absolution is the dispensation of a benefit, which belongs to another, yet it is not to be considered as merely a ministry, whether to publish the gospel or to declare the remission of sins, but as of the nature of a *judicial act,* in which *sentence is pronounced by him as a judge:* and therefore the penitent ought not to flatter himself on account of his faith, so

as that, though he should have no contrition, and though *the priest should not intend to act seriously and really to absolve him,** he should suppose that he is nevertheless truly absolved before God, on the ground of his faith only. For faith without penance cannot procure remission of sins; nor would any one, unless extremely negligent of his own salvation, be satisfied with a priest who absolved him jestingly, but would carefully seek for one who should be serious in the performance of his office."†

I would call the attention of my reader to the last quotation more especially, because it clearly proves that we do not misrepresent the Romish tenets, when we say that the priest claims the power of forgiving sins as a judge. His sentence is a *judicial act,* expressly declared to be so. In connexion with this arrogant

* The underscoring is mine.

† Con. Trid. Sess. 14. cap. 3, 5 and 6.

claim, there is a most unfortunate circumstance; it is this; the priest's good intention is necessary to the validity of the absolution which he gives. The Council of Trent expressly tell their penitents "that they ought not so to flatter themselves concerning their own faith, as to think that they are absolved truly and before God, when the priest has not a mind to act seriously, and truly to absolve them!" Unhappy penitents! No humiliation before an offended God, no satisfaction made to an injured neighbour, no resolution or endeavour to amend, no real reformation of heart and life, nor all these together, can possibly avail anything without the good-will of the priest! Nor is this the whole of this monstrous impiety; for if the proper intention of the priest be essential, then God himself cannot absolve a sinner, unless the priest, when he pronounces the words of absolution, is so kind as to do it with the serious intention of his heart! Now, I suppose some of the more igno-

rant of my Roman Catholic friends will think that after all, I have not fairly stated the doctrine of their church. To remove every doubt as to the propriety of this construction, I will read the canon referring to this matter.

"Whoever shall affirm that the priest's sacramental absolution is not a judicial act, but only a ministry, to pronounce and declare that the sins of the party confessing are forgiven, so that he believes himself to be absolved, even though the priest should not absolve seriously, but in jest; or shall affirm that the confession of the penitent is not necessary in order to obtain absolution from the priest, let him be accursed."*

This doctrine of the necessity of the priest's good intention hangs like a nether millstone about the neck of the Romish sacraments. I defy a Romanist to prove that there is at this day any such thing as

* Can. 9. De Sanct. Poenit. Sac.

a priest, or indeed a Christian in the world. According to their doctrine, all Christians are in the communion of the Popish church; out of its pale there is no salvation, and *in* the Romish church there is no salvation, unless the priest dispenses the sacraments with the proper intention. Now, when the priest baptized you, how can you tell that he performed the service with the intention which the church requires? And how can the priest know whether the person from whom he received the *sacrament* (forsooth) of holy orders really *intended* to consecrate him? If the intention was wanting, your baptism was not valid, and, according to Popish doctrine, you must be rebaptized or be damned! And if the bishop did not intend really to consecrate the priest, his ordination is not valid, and every official act he performs, according to the same principle, is also invalid! There is another point that must be considered in this connexion. The penitent, before he can ob-

tain absolution, must make satisfaction, and in order to accomplish this, certain punishments are enjoined at the discretion of the priest; and these, in their canons, are called "a sort of compensation for an injury done." Now, let it be termed "a satisfaction made unto God, through Jesus Christ," as it is by the Council of Trent, and let it be coloured over ever so plausibly with the appearances of religion, yet so long as it rests solely with the good pleasure of the priest what satisfaction shall be appointed, it is plain that the great concern after all is to satisfy *him*, and unless this is done, there is no absolution. *Alms*, in connexion with fasting and prayer, are the principal means of making satisfaction; though there are innumerable other penances which the priest may impose. If this satisfaction be not made, let it consist of whatever penance it may, though the sinner should break his heart with contrition, and incur the greatest humiliation by exposing his

secret sins, all this signifies nothing; there is no absolution without satisfaction! The priests are judges and arbiters in the whole affair of repentance. There are, it is true, certain cases which are reserved to the decision of the Pope, and to bishops in their respective dioceses; these are sins which a common priest cannot forgive, except when death threatens the penitent, and in that case, any priest may grant absolution. I shall proceed to examine the evidence offered in the Grounds of Cath. Doct., in support of this priestly authority.

"What Scripture have you to prove that the bishop and priests of the church have power to absolve the sinner that confesses his sins with a sincere repentance?"

John xx. 22, 23. "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose sins ye retain, they are retained." Matt. xviii. 18. "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye

shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

Then follows a quotation from the Episcopal prayer-book, the object of which is to show that Protestants agree with papists in their interpretation of this Scripture. Notwithstanding the authority of this rubric from the Book of Common Prayer, we cannot yet subscribe to auricular confession. The question with us is not, what does the Book of Common Prayer say, but what saith the Scripture? There is this important difference to be observed, however, that the confession of his sins to the minister is left optional with the penitent in the Episcopal church, whilst the church of Rome insists upon it as essential to salvation. We love our *Episcopal* brethren with a pure heart, fervently, and we honour their church as a portion of the true Catholic church of

* Grounds of Cath. Doct., p. 34.

Christ; but, in Christian charity be it said, we think the Reformation stopped a little too soon in the church of England.

But to return to the *proofs*. "Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted," &c. In the first place, there is no mention made here of confession of sins, much less of auricular confession to a priest; secondly, Christ defines the nature of the commission which he gave his apostles, when he says in the preceding verse, "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you." Now Jesus was not sent to hear private confessions, and thereupon to give absolution, but by preaching to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. Neither did he ever bind upon them any obligation to confess their sins in the ear of a popish priest. But waiving this objection; when Christ breathed upon the apostles as a token of conferring the Holy Ghost upon them, did he at the same time breathe

upon all the *priests* that were to come into the world? Did he, by the same action, or by any other, convey the Holy Ghost to *them?* Now it is necessary that they who assume the right of remitting and retaining sins, should be able to prove to us that they have received the Holy Ghost. "Exactly so," says the papist, "and our church teaches that every priest, at his ordination, receives the Holy Ghost when the bishop consecrates him to his holy office." Then you must prove that the bishop has received authority to dispense the Spirit to whomsoever he thinks fit. This will be rather a hard matter. The *Doway* Bible as well as the *Holy* Bible teaches that the residue of the Spirit is with God, and not with either Pope, or Bishop, or Priest. Besides, we should naturally suppose that they who receive the Holy Ghost must be very holy men. Now, I have not the honour to be personally acquainted with any of the brotherhood, and consequently cannot speak from

personal knowledge; but I have St. Ligori's opinion of them. In his system of theology, a synopsis of which is before me, he uses this language:

"Among the priests who live in the world, it is rare, very rare to find *any* that are good. For in order that a priest should be good in the world, it is necessary that he should lead a very exemplary life, remote from plays, from idleness, and from evil company. He should be given to prayer, and should frequent the sacraments; but where is such a priest to be found, and we will praise him?"*

Perhaps the saint refers to the Italian priests; but then you know "holy church is always and everywhere the same;" this is her standing boast. In the judgment of charity, I believe the priests in our country are not so corrupt as in some others. Indeed I know they are not. But according to Roman Catholic doctrine, the per-

* Synopsis of Ligori's Theology, p. 73.

sonal character of the priest has nothing to do with the case; even those who are living in mortal sin exercise this function of forgiving sin. Here then we have the strange anomaly of a wicked priest, who has nevertheless received the Holy Ghost, whilst we are repeatedly told in the word of God, that the Spirit of God is a Spirit of holiness. We are warned not to grieve the Holy Ghost, by indulging in any known sin. If they have received the Holy Ghost, they must be holy *men;* so that if you find ANY bad priests, you have "living epistles" from which all men may know and read the arrogance, presumption, and absurdity of popery.

But the other text tells us, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. xviii. 18.) The power of binding and loosing is evidently the same as that of remitting and retaining sins. It was given not to *Peter* only, but to *all* the

apostles. But the Roman Catholic will tell us, "you cannot deny that the keys of the kingdom of heaven were given to Peter alone." I do not wish to deny it, for Christ says, speaking to *Peter*, "I will give unto *thee* the keys of the kingdom of heaven." The keys were unquestionably given to Peter. The term "kingdom of heaven" is repeatedly used in the New Testament, (as all know who understand their Bible,) to designate the gospel dispensation. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." In these passages, the phrases "kingdom of heaven," and "kingdom of God," are used to denote the gospel dispensation. The giving to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, manifestly receives its explication from his being first employed to preach the doctrines of the gospel after our Lord's resurrection and ascension.

Whoever was first after this event employed to preach the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven, might very well be said to open the gates of that kingdom by the keys given to him for that purpose. Now as some one person must be first in opening the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven; so the grant of the keys was made to one person, to Peter alone, and never to any other; but the power of binding and loosing, mentioned in the same verse, (Matt. xvi. 19,) and in Matt. xviii. 18, and that of remitting and retaining sins in John xx. were granted to *all* the apostles as much as to him. Hence we see that the trite popish phrase of "the power of the keys," which has always been construed by papists as intimating the power of binding and loosing, has originated in a misapprehension of Scripture. Papists infer from this passage the supremacy of Peter. Peter had the keys and no one else. Peter was the first Pope, and Peter left the keys to his successor in the papal See. Did he

indeed? By whose authority? Did the Saviour say, "I give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven," and "I charge thee to leave them to thy successor?" No! If the power of the keys belonged to Peter, he had no right to give it away; he exceeded his commission by one-half when he left his keys in the care of the Pope. How ineffably ridiculous does this claim of supremacy appear when examined by the simple light of Scripture. Christ assures Peter that in his preaching he should be enabled so effectually to deliver the terms on which the Lord would pardon sinners, that no one should fail of salvation who complied with them; and so to denounce the terrors of God's wrath against unbelievers, that whosoever would not submit to the gospel, and accept of its salvation, should be forever damned. Thus they who were commissioned by Christ to preach the everlasting gospel, might justly be said by their declaration of its solemn truths, to *bind* as it were

upon their disciples, the sin of rejecting the counsel of God, or to loose those from their sins who embraced and believed the truth of God. The words cannot be taken literally without encroaching upon the prerogative of God. He alone has power to bind and to loose. He alone can forgive sins. "Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity?" (Mic. vii. 18.) He only can destroy both soul and body in hell. "Fear not them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Hence the enmity of the Jews was always aroused against Christ, when, by virtue of his power as God, "*he forgave sins.*" Said they, "This man blasphemeth." In addition to this, you know that when the Saviour wished to establish his claim to divinity, he did so by showing that he had power to forgive sins, and by confirming that claim by a miracle. "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power

upon earth to forgive sin, he saith to the sick of the palsy, 'I say unto thee, arise, and take up thy couch and go unto thine house.'"

Moreover, the passage in Matt. xviii. does not even remotely relate to the subject of confession to a priest, but to the manner in which offenders are to be treated by the church when they refuse to listen to private and public admonition.

But let us hear the Grounds of Cath. Doct. farther, "How do you prove from the texts above quoted, the necessity of the faithful confessing their sins to the pastors of the church in order to obtain the absolution and remission of them?

"Because in the text above quoted, Christ has made the pastors of his church his judges in the court of conscience, with commission and authority to bind or to loose, to forgive or to retain sins, according to the merits of the cause, and the disposition of the penitents. Now as no judge can pass sentence without having a

full knowledge of the cause, which cannot be had in this kind of causes, which regards men's consciences, but by their own confession, it clearly follows, that he who has made the pastors of his church the judges of men's consciences, has also laid an obligation upon the faithful to lay open the state of their consciences to them, if they hope to have their sins remitted. Nor would our Lord have given to his church the power of retaining sins, much less the keys of the kingdom of heaven, (Matt. xvi. 19,) if such sins as exclude men from the kingdom of heaven might be remitted independently of the keys of the church."

It is a hard matter for those who have been educated in the principles of civil and religious liberty to repress the indignation which the avowal of such sentiments as these must awaken. "Christ has made the priests his judges in the court of conscience, with commission and authority to bind or to loose, to forgive

or retain sins, according to the merits of the cause, and the disposition of the penitents!!" Of the merits of every cause, the priests of course *are the sole arbiters.* If this be not the quintessence of despotism and arrogance, then I say there is no such thing as tyranny on earth! If Christ has made the priests his judges in the court of conscience, they may enjoin any act of wickedness which they choose, and the good papist must obey his ghostly tyrants or lose his soul. He gives his conscience entirely into the care of the priest, and after thus bowing down and forgetting that God made him a *man*, and gave him a mind to think for himself, and a conscience to regulate his conduct, he is prepared for any atrocity which the priests may require. He can comfort himself with the reflection, that if the deed is sinful, the guilt rests with the priest, the keeper of his conscience; and the last of the fifty reasons which the papist can assign for not being a Protestant may be

that which the Duke of Brunswick mentions as so very consoling; that if he should be so unfortunate as to die in a state of mortal sin, his priest had promised to be damned in his stead. Ah! my friend, if you die in your sins, if you make another man the keeper of your conscience, "and bow down that he may go over," you will find to your sorrow that you cannot be damned by proxy. I shall call up this subject again before I close, and I therefore proceed to the next proof which is offered in the Grounds of Cath. Doct. p. 36: "When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising, a scab, or bright spot, and it be in the skin of his flesh like the plague of leprosy, then he shall be brought unto Aaron the priest, or unto one of his sons the priests." Now there is certainly no mention here of confession of sins; the man is brought to the priest to ascertain the nature of the eruption on his skin, not to confess his sins. "Well," the papist will tell us, "this,

according to the holy fathers, was emblematical of the confession of sins in the sacrament." But the earliest of these fathers say nothing about auricular confession. "Some of the later fathers, however, teach this doctrine." Is it so? Then some of the holy fathers must have been very much straitened for Scripture evidence in support of aricular confession; for observe,

1. The infected person was not to come and confess himself a leper to the priest; but the priest was to judge him so, and to pronounce him a leper; "the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him unclean;" Lev. xiii. 3, and then the leper was to cry and confess, not to the priest, but to the *people* that he was unclean, verse 45.

2. Again, there was a plain law, requiring the priest to pronounce judgment in case of leprosy; but where is the law which requires *only a priest* to hear pri-

vate confession? Not in the Bible, certainly.

3. The priest's examination of the leper was not in private, but in *the presence of others.*

4. The priest did not always declare the person to be free from a leprosy; but the popish priest always absolves the sinner upon due confession of his sins.

These points are sufficient to show that the holy fathers have not selected a very appropriate emblem to represent the sacrament of penance.

I proceed to the next proof that is offered. "In the same law, a special confession of sins was expressly prescribed. (Num. v. 6, 7.) When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the Lord, and that person be guilty; then they shall confess their sins which they have done."

But this does not speak of confessing in the ear of a priest; the man or woman was not required to enumerate every evil

thought, word, or deed; and to ransack every corner of his conscience, as papists must; but the context shows that reference is here made to certain fraudulent transactions for which restitution was due. Now whenever restitution is made, reason demands that the details of the case be acknowledged in order to show why and for what the indemnification is offered. Besides, this text does not speak of confession to a *priest*. It may have been to God, or it may have been to the party wronged; and at all events, if it was made to a priest, he did not sit in a corner of the tabernacle and let the penitent whisper in his ear, for it will be remembered that the common people never came into the tabernacle, but always met the priest in the outer court where it was impossible to be private.

The next Scripture adduced in the Grounds of Cath. Doct. is James v. 16. "Confess your sins, one to another: i. e. to the priests or elders of the church,

whom the apostle has ordered to be called for." (v. 14.) It is very important that the words "one to another," should mean "the priests or elders;" hence we cannot deny that this explanation is very convenient. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." If this text is to support auricular confession, it is plain, that after the priest has heard the confession of his penitent, he must confess his sins in turn. "Confess your faults, *one to another*;" and after the priest has prayed for the person who has confessed, he must request that individual to return the favour, that *he* too may be healed. "Pray one for another, that ye may be healed." I need not say, that such a course as this would be derogatory to the dignity of those "whom Christ has made his judges in the court of conscience."

One text more, and the proofs of Pope Pius are exhausted. "Many that believed, came and confessed, and showed

their deeds." (Acts xix. 18.) But if auricular confession is a duty incumbent on *all* the faithful, why did only *many* that believed, come and confess? Why did they not *all* come? Moreover, if this is a proof that confession is to be made in the ear of a priest, why was this confession made in public? Why did they not drop down on their knees before father Paul, in his confessional-box, and make the sign of the cross, and kiss the good apostle's hand, and go over their confiteor, and whisper their sins in his ear? They went to work openly, not in a dark corner; they brought their bad books, and burned them before all the people.* I do wish the priests would let their light shine before men, in the same way.

Now, I would not have any of my hearers suppose that Protestants do not believe it proper to confess their sins. We believe confession to be an important part

* Acts xix. 18, 19.

of repentance. We confess our sins to *God.* We believe it to be incumbent upon Christians, to examine themselves daily; to make daily and particular confession to Him, who seeth in secret. We also believe it right, in some instances, to confess our sins to our brethren. If I have wronged a brother, and am convinced of my error, it is a privilege, not a penance, to go to him, and confess the injury, and make restitution to the best of my ability. We also admit, that when men find their consciences burdened and distressed, they may sometimes profitably reveal their case to a Christian minister, and be benefited by his counsel and prayers; but if this is done, it is optional with the person who makes the confession. He is nowhere *commanded* to confess to a priest; much less is he authorized to expect absolution from a fellow-sinner. WE expect absolution only through faith in the meritorious sacrifice of Christ. "In Him, WE have redemption through his blood," not

through the "absolvo te" of a Popish priest.

As to the matter of penance, of which auricular confession is only a part, I ask, where is there a single passage in the whole New Testament, which enjoins the performance of a Romish penance? An uneducated papist will tell us, that penance is enjoined again and again. So it is, in the Doway Bible; but a learned *Priest* knows very well, that the true meaning of the Greek μετανοια and μετανοειν is not exhibited by the expressions "penance," and "to do penance." Those words, from the very necessity of their etymology, relate not to any outward austerities, but purely and exclusively to that moral change of mind, which we denominate "*repentance.*" Every priest, who understands Greek, must laugh in his sleeve, when he imposes *penance.*

But all these objections to auricular confessions are only secondary; and, having disposed of the proofs, which Pope

Pius offers in support of this practice of the Romish church, we will proceed to bring forward still stronger reasons against it.

1. *Auricular confession, as established in the church of Rome, tends to the grossest immorality and profligacy.* You will remember the arrogant claim of the Popish priests. They profess to be judges in the court of conscience. They bind and loose at their pleasure; and, in order to enable them to act understandingly, of course it is necessary that the secrets of the soul should all be laid open to their scrutiny. Under this pretext, the most immodest and filthy questions are put to the penitents who come to confess their sins. The sixth volume of Dens' Moral Theology is devoted entirely to penance, auricular confession, and the connected topics.

I will read a few paragraphs, as specimens of the practical casuistry of the existing Romish priesthood.

"De Interrogationibus Faciendis;" concerning the interrogatories propounded at confession. "The priest ought to examine the conscience of the sinner at confession, as a physician does a wound, and a judge a cause; because, frequently, that which the person confessing would retain in silence, will be revealed by inquiries." "There are two reasons why sin is not disclosed; shame and fear, or ignorance and simplicity. If the confessor observes that the penitent is reserved, through shame and fear, he must begin his interrogatories from the greater sins, such as homicide, adultery, sacrilege, &c., because the penitent will promptly answer, that it is not so enormous a crime, and will then disclose the truth to evade suspicion of the greater transgression. If the confessor perceives that the acknowledgment of sin is evaded through ignorance or simplicity, he must commence his questions by the minor offences."

Then follows a paragraph concerning questions relative to particular details, succeeded by another, concerning the sins of particular conditions. Some of the questions upon this topic are so vile that I dare not copy them. Suffice it to say, the ghostly fathers propound interrogations which must, originally, have been conceived by minds familiar with the grossest pollutions of the dens of infamy and prostitution. If the questions laid down in Dens' Theology, recently republished in Ireland, and in use at the Roman Catholic college at Maynooth, an approved text-book on Moral Theology, are really put at confessionals in this city, then I cannot conceive how any Roman Catholic, who has any regard for the virtue of his wife or daughters, will suffer them to go to confession.

The following extracts are taken from an edition of Dens' Theology, which I received a few weeks ago from Germany. The edition is probably the latest that has

been printed, being dated 1838. It was published at Mechlin, a town of the Netherlands, the see of an archbishop, and comes from the arch-episcopal press—"Superiorum permissu,"—stamped with the seal of infallibility, so that there is no possibility of mistake, especially as the title page assures us, that it is "Editio nova emendata," *a new and revised edition.* I suppose the priests will be ashamed of Peter Dens' System of Theology, as they have been of Saint Ligori's; but they must either endorse Peter Dens, or quarrel with the Dutch archbishop. It will not be the first time, however, that the "Infallibles" have "fallen out by the way," and I shall not be much surprised if they do so again. The sixth volume treats at length "De Confessione Sacramentali," concerning "Sacramental Confession," and the connected topics, "De danda vel neganda absolutione," &c., concerning "Giving or refusing absolu-

tion," &c. This treatise begins with No. 63.

"What is sacramental confession?

"I. It is the voluntary accusation of one's own sins made to a priest having authority, in order to obtain remission of them, through the power of the keys.

"II. Contains the reasons of this definition.

"By what authority has confession been introduced?

"III. By positive, divine authority, inasmuch as it was instituted by Christ, the Lord. It is proved by tradition, and by the definition of the Council of Trent, Sess. 14, c. 5, and Can. 6. It is proved also by the words of Christ, John xx. 23. "Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them," &c.

"Some understand the text of James v. 16, 'Confess one to another,' as relating to sacramental confession.

"IV. The Calvinists object that auricular confession was introduced by human au-

thority, in the fourth Lat. Council, under Innocent III., in the 13th century.

"The Fathers of the Council of Trent (Sess. 14, c. 5,) reply, that this is an empty calumny of the heretics;" (and thus the poor Calvinists receive their quietus!) "but in that council, only the time of the annual confession was determined and appointed; and this had been before observed in the church.

"Just reasoning refutes this objection: because it is not to be conceived, nor is it possible that all men would have tolerated without any contradiction, so heavy a burden as the confession of secret sins, unless holy church had practised it from the beginning, by divine authority; but no history makes mention of any contradiction; *ergo*."

This is very just reasoning indeed. The fact that no early ecclesiastical writer notices any murmurs against auricular confession, proves very satisfactorily that *every* body was satisfied with

it—or else it proves that *nobody knew any thing at all about it*; *ergo*. But to proceed; "It is objected that Nectarius, the Bishop of Constantinople, in the 4th century, abolished confession, as Socrates and Sozomenus relate, therefore confession is not of divine authority.

"Answer—Baronius accuses their histories of falsehood."

This is the stereotype method of Popish authors and papists, when they cannot explain the difficulties with which heretics are for ever perplexing them. The *gentlemen* and *ladies*, who triumphantly refuted the statements of the Rev. Mr. Sparry, who recently lectured on Romanism in this city, employed the same *argument* as Baronius, "Sir, you are a liar." This is certainly unanswerable.

"The usual answer is, that in this instance, sacramental confession was not abrogated, but public confession before the people, or perhaps, only the public confession of secret sins, or merely the

mention of an accomplice; from the occasion that a certain noble woman through an indiscreet zeal, had publicly confessed a sin with a deacon in the temple; from which public confession, scandal and murmuring of the populace had resulted. In the west, however, the practice of public confession continued beyond the sixth century."

The word "distinguo," in the vocabulary of a Jesuit is of admirable use, and it would be very difficult for him to dispense with it. Whenever facts are fairly at issue with his theory, whenever Scripture contradicts his vain traditions, he evades all unwelcome evidence by his "distinguo." The Bible tells us, "There is one God, and *one Mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." This single passage falls like an axe upon the root of the idolatrous "invocation of saints;" but the Jesuit cries out, "distinguo"—"I make a distinction" between the *atoning*

mediator, and *mediators of intercession!* So in the case before us; Socrates and Sozomenus, whose testimony in other matters is considered unexceptionable, are accused of falsehood when they say that Nectarius, in the 4th century, abolished confession; but then the heretics might turn the point of this accusation right against holy church, and argue that if these two historians have published falsehoods in one case, they might have done it in another, and thus all their testimony would be worthless. Hence, to obviate this difficulty, the Jesuit cries out again, "distinguo." You must distinguish between *sacramental* confession, and *public* confession.

V. Enlarges upon the important distinction between sacramental and public confession. * * *

"What advantages does the confession of sins afford?

"Besides the effects stated, No. 29, it affords the following advantages." But

first, we will translate No. 29, in order that the beneficial effects of auricular confession may all be fairly brought before us. This is important, because Protestants have been at a loss to know what good fruit this corrupt tree could bring forth.

"De effectibus poenitentiae," concerning the results of penance.

"What are the effects of penance?

"1. The remission of sins and of eternal punishment, and of all temporal punishment, whensoever (confession is made.)

"2. Also the revival of virtues and good works or merits."

But besides the above mentioned, these results of the sacrament of penance are noticed:

"3. Sanctifying grace, which is imparted through the influence of the sacrament, by the (meritorious) observance of the ordinance, (ex opere operato.)

"4. Also sacramental blessings from the observance of the ordinance, or actual blessings, even such as are to be confer-

red subsequently, in order to accomplish works of penance, to avoid sins, to overcome temptations, &c.

"5. The Counc. of Trent, Sess. 14, c. 3, says, that there is wont sometimes to ensue peace and tranquillity of conscience, with great spiritual consolation."

So much for No. 29.

I recur to the former question—

"What advantages does the confession of sins afford?

"Besides the effects stated, No. 29, it affords the following advantages:

"VI. 1. Proper counsels and remedies against sins are received from the confessor.

"2. Through the shame and humiliation of confession, it serves usefully for some satisfaction for past sins, and to restrain from future (offences.)

"VII. Sacramental confession was prefigured in this, that Christ, Matt. viii. 4, sent the lepers to the priests: also, that under the Old Testament dispensation, sin-

ners were compelled to go to the priests, to offer sacrifices for their sins.

"And what is more, Corn. à Lapide supposes that under the old covenant, there was a necessity of confessing all sins to the priests; and this he proves by the variety of the sacrifices for sins.

"The multifarious expiations and purifications in the Old Testament, were figures of the sacrament of penance."

I have given this first section at length, because it contains the apology for auricular confession, upon which the priests place the greatest dependence. The few paragraphs which are omitted are unimportant. The fanciful and forced interpretation of the meaning of Jewish rites, defies sober criticism; and therefore I shall not attempt to deprive the advocates of auricular confession, of any consolation which the suggestions of Corn. à Lapide may afford.

How admirably the questions proposed at the confessional, are adapted to over-

whelm the penitent with "shame and humiliation," we shall see presently.

All the extracts which I give from Dens' Theology, are complete in themselves. I shall be obliged, of course, to select paragraphs, but I will do it so that neither sense nor scope shall suffer, if I can help it. If the priests accuse me of offering garbled extracts, it will be easy for them to expose my unfairness, by translating the whole treatise, and publishing it to the world, "permissu superiorum." There are some passages, which I shall have to refer to them, at any rate. They are of such a character, that immaculate purity and impeccability can alone be entrusted with them.

In No. 66, we are told, that according to the decree of the Lateran Council, "Every one of the faithful of both sexes, after he (or she) shall have reached the years of discretion, must faithfully confess all his (or her) sins alone, at least once a year, to the proper priest," i. e. (not to a stranger,)

which the Council of Trent, Sess. 14, c. 5, and Can. 8, confirms, and (which) is commonly recited among the five rules of the church."

The next paragraph explains—"*The faithful,*" i. e. a baptized person; *after he shall have reached the years of discretion;* that is to say, after he shall have sinned; *all his sins,* that the confession may be complete; *faithfully,* i. e. truly; *alone,* that he may confess in secret, not in public; *once in the year,* from the last confession." If all the faithful confess *every one* of their sins, (and they must do it, or the confession is not complete,) I pity their confessors. David says, in Ps. xl. 12, "Mine iniquities are more than the hairs of mine head," and I fear that very few of the faithful have fewer sins to confess, than David had. But to help themselves from this difficulty, there is a "distinguo" in readiness again. There is a distinction made between a confession *formally* and *materially* complete.

No. 68, treats of those who are under obligation to confess, particularly of boys.

"Who are bound by the Ecclesiastical rule of confession?"

"All baptized persons, who have attained to years of discretion and have sinned.

"When may they be considered to have reached those years of discretion?

"I. When they have attained to such a use of reason that they are able to discern between *moral* good and evil, &c. * * *

"Boys are presumed to have reached this period of the use of reason, usually about the seventh or eighth year of their age; some sooner, others later: for a difference occurs according to the developement of the brain, and education and practice—for Greg. l. 4, Dial. c. 18, tells of a boy five years old condemned for blasphemy: so that sometimes it may be proper to say with St. Augustine: 'So little a boy, and so great a sinner.'

"Therefore even very young boys may advantageously be sent to a confessor, in

order that the priest may judge of their discretion, and the boys themselves may learn and become accustomed to confess. Indeed this is a great part of the pastoral charge, that a pastor on every holiday, should allure some of the little children to the confessional, whom he may hear whilst others, who are adults do not come; for he, who wishes to reform a parish, and bring it to better fruits, should begin with the boys."

People are sometimes at a loss to know the secret of the singular benevolence, which actuates the priests in opening schools for the special benefit of Protestant children; but the mystery is explained; the object is "to reform the parish," by prepossessing the minds of the youth in favour of Popery. When will unsuspecting Protestants learn that the wily priests never expend their money or their influence upon objects that will not promote their own aggrandizement?

"Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes."

No. 72, treats of the punishments of those who do not confess, and of *causes* which excuse them.

"What is the punishment of those who transgress the ecclesiastical rule of annual confession?"

"I. These things are decreed in the chapter, *Every one of both sexes, &c.*—"Living let him be driven from the threshold of the church, and dying let him be denied Christian burial; that is to say, when these two things concur—that this omission is notorious, and that at the close of life, he has given no evidences of sorrow; which is gathered from the Roman ritual.

"The punishment of one, who does not commune at Easter is the same.

"This punishment is not properly speaking, excommunication; but as it were, a certain part of it, as Steyaert says," &c. &c.

The policy of this ecclesiastical severity is so apparent that comment is scarcely

necessary. So long as a man can forget himself so far as to bow down before a fellow mortal, and breathe into human ears the confession, which is due to God alone, the priests may be sure that their victim is well secured in the meshes of their net; if he struggles and attempts to break loose from its toils, Holy Mother cries out with her *lamblike* voice—"Living let him be sequestered from the threshold of the church, and dying let him be denied Christian burial."

I shall be obliged to pass over many numbers in the treatise "de Confessione Sacramentali," which at some future day and under more favourable circumstances, I may review. I can do no more at present than simply give such extracts as will illustrate the true character of the doctrine of auricular confession as taught in the standards of the Romish church. I shall therefore proceed to No. 91, which treats,

"*De Interrogationibus in particulari.*"

Concerning what things may the confessor interrogate the penitent?

"I. I answer with the Roman ritual, the pastoral letter of the Archbishop at Mechlin, and S. Carolus Borr.

"II. 1. How long ago, or since what time, he has confessed.

"2. Of what state he is (unless he should be known), that is, whether he is a married man, bound by a vow (of celibacy), the father of a family, a merchant, mechanic, &c.; in order that he may be interrogated concerning sins, which are usually committed in such a state.

"3. Whether he has performed the penance imposed.

"4. Whether he has rightly and completely confessed at other times.

"5. Whether he has previously diligently ransacked or examined his conscience, as he ought.

"6. Whether he has learned the rudiments and articles of faith, and other things necessary to be known.

"7. If the penitent shall not have expressed the number, and kinds, of his sins, and the circumstances necessary to be explained, let the priest prudently question him.

"8. Further, in order that the confessor may not be embarrassed in investigating the circumstances of any sin, let him have in readiness this line of circumstances,

"Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando.

"Who, what, where, by what help, why, how, when.

"What may be denoted by each of these particles, is compendiously explained towards the close of the practical models, at the end of this volume."

We will give a few specimens from these *models* before we close.

"At what time is it proper to institute these inquiries?

"II. Some divide them so that some are instituted before, others after the exposition of sins: ordinarily however, as Stey-

aert, Bossuet, and others observe, they are more conveniently instituted after it; because, whilst the penitent is interrupted in his narrative, which he has prepared beforehand, by attention to the inquiries of the confessor, he sometimes forgets something; and because not unfrequently, things proper to be asked, become known through the confession of the penitent.

"IV. In practice, however, it is customary to proceed in this manner: After the blessing has been bestowed on the penitent, we first ask the length of time elapsed since the last confession; or if he tells this of his own accord, we reply, in order to inspire him with confidence: Very well, bravo: What has happened? Then the penitent is permitted to tell the whole without interruption, except, perhaps, by way of helping or exhorting him to go on boldly. But, in the mean time, if the penitent say any thing concerning a matter about which he is to be interrogated later, the confessor *notes the same*

*upon his ten fingers,** by reducing all sins to the ten commandments of the decalogue; yet in such a way that no one can observe it. When the penitent ceases, the confessor asks concerning the things which he has marked; except, however, the more lengthy confessions, in which the confessor might suffer risk of forgetfulness on account of the great number; and thus, in general confessions, the particular questions are usually to be drawn from the commencement.

"Are all penitents to be interrogated concerning every commandment?

"V. No; as we may often discreetly judge that the penitent is deficient in no particular; but the period elapsed since the last confession ought always to be inquired into, because it very much facilitates the judgment of the confessor.

"Ought the penitent sometimes to be

* "Idem, notat ad decem digitos."

questioned concerning sins about which he confesses nothing at all?

"VI. Yes. 1. When the sins that have been exposed cause the confessor to suspect other offences, from the fact that they are usually connected with, or are the effects or causes of those sins; thus of a drunkard it is asked, what sins he may be in the habit of committing whilst in a state of intoxication.

"VII. 2. When a penitent confesses nothing about the sins of his own condition, and he still appears to be of a somewhat dissolute life; that is, we inquire concerning the sins which are wont ordinarily to be committed by persons of this state, condition, or trade; thus we ask a labourer, whether he has performed his appointed work."

I have given this No. in detail, as it furnishes accurate information respecting the rules which govern the inquiries of the priests. They may keep a penitent upon his or her knees a longer or shorter

time, according to their good pleasure, "as they may often discreetly judge that the penitent is deficient in no particular." Should it happen, however, that they are not disposed to exercise this *discretion*, on account of something peculiarly interesting in the penitent, inquiries may be instituted, as we shall see presently, into every thought, word and deed of the penitent, be that person man or woman, married or unmarried.

Under the article No. 92, we find the following question amongst the rest.

"Concerning what things may young men be examined of about the age of twenty years rather lusty and worldly, or given to drink?"

"Concerning the sins of luxury; at first by general inquiries and indirectly; v. g. whether the penitent frequently associates with persons of the other sex? If he admit: whether any indecent words were spoken? What followed? &c. If he deny,

it may be asked: whether he is sometimes troubled with indecent thoughts or dreams? If he say he is, it will be necessary to proceed to farther inquiries, as Schema VIII. No. 278 teaches."

Before I translate one part, and transcribe the remainder of No. 278, in the original Latin, I will just premise, that Peter Dens teaches that the same discreet form of words may be accommodated to the case of a girl or woman whose apparel or general appearance is gay. There are portions in this formula, which I dare not translate; and I would not transcribe them were it not that there are so many whose mawkish charity for the abominations of Popery, leads them to disbelieve every thing which affects the SANCTITY of the Romish apostacy.

No. 278 is entitled—

"*A method of discreetly examining concerning immodest thoughts.*"

"*Penitent.* I have had immodest thoughts.

"*Confessor.* Have you given cause or occasion to them by look, conversation? &c.

"*Pen.* No.

"*Conf.* Did you endeavour to repel them?

"*Pen.* No.

"*Conf.* How long did you voluntarily persist in them?

"*Pen.* During five 'Pater et Ave.'

"*Conf.* How often did this happen?

"*Pen.* Once.

"*Conf.* Did you take delight in them?

"*Pen.* Yes.

"*Conf.* Did you also give your consent to any bad deed, or, was there any desire or wish to do a bad action, if opportunity had been afforded?

"*Pen.* No; but it was only a morose delight to which I gave my consent.

"*Conf.* About what object, and about what thing was the delight?

"*Pen.* Circa copulam, cum filia hones-

ta libera, mihi nulla cognatione vel affinitate juncta.

"*Conf.* What are you, unmarried, married, or bound by a vow? (of celibacy.)

"*Pen.* I am an unmarried young man.

"*Conf.* An inde secutae sunt aliquae commotiones carnales in corpore?

"*Pen.* Yes.

"*Conf.* Did you endeavour to resist those impulses, and to repel them?

"*Pen.* No, but I simply permitted them.

"*Conf.* An secuta est pollutio?

"*Pen.* Ita.

"*Conf.* Did you then persist in these thoughts and pleasures?

"*Pen.* No; but I immediately trembled with horror, restrained my emotions, abandoned these thoughts, betook myself to God, and invoked the names of Jesus and Mary."

Abominable as this "discreet formula" is, it is pure as the clear blue heaven [illegible] us, compared with some other passages,

which I might quote from the priests' manual of theology.

Now, let our Roman Catholic brethren remember that these or similar questions may be put at the discretion of any priest, who acts as confessor, to their wives and daughters. What man is there, unless he is prepared to surrender himself and his wife and children to the sovereign will of a popish priest, that can consent to let them go to the confessional? Do our Roman brethren know, that according to the maxims and rules of Holy Peter Dens, their wives are questioned, or are *liable to be interrogated,* on subjects of the most hallowed and sacred character, and which may not even be named without offering an insult to virtuous modesty? I assure my reader, that I would not dare to transcribe even the *captions* of certain sections in Peter Dens' System of Iniquity; much less ask him to wade through the slough of pollution, in which the holy theologian revels with all the evident delight of the

swine that wallows in the mire. His nice and critical disquisitions upon the various degrees of turpitude to be attached to violations of decorum, unheard of except in dens of prostitution and bestiality, and *at the confessional*, prove that the Doctor of Divinity was perfectly familiar with his subject, and that his diploma was well earned. It is true, it might appear strange and almost inconceivable, how a HOLY PRIEST, bound by a solemn oath of celibacy, should be perfectly familiar with subjects, of which those, who are under no such vow, are utterly ignorant; but there are so many stranger things in the system, that this incongruity is scarcely worth notice.

Suffice it to say, that there is nothing too sacred or too secret to be exempt from the inquiry of the confessor, if he sees fit to insist upon the unhallowed scrutiny. I ask again, do our Roman Catholic brethren really know that the priest claims the right of putting questions to

their wives, which must crimson the cheek of modesty with the burning blush of shame, and subject every female of common decency, to the most exquisite mental and moral torture? And is it possible, that in this age of liberty and refinement, men of noble heart and intellect can meekly tolerate such an outrage upon their social and domestic rights, and quietly endure the unparalleled impudence and arrogance, which would prostrate their wives and virgin daughters at the feet of a —— *popish priest?*

I am far from regarding the doctrine and practice of auricular confession, as I would look upon an excrescence, that disfigures the trunk and boughs of a tree, which may be valuable, notwithstanding its deformity. Auricular confession, with all its affiliated abominations, is the *fruit*, the natural and the necessary *fruit* of the "corrupt tree," whose root is at Rome, and whose poisonous boughs cover so large a portion of Europe and of the

world with the darkness of the shadow of death.

The church of Rome is perfectly consistent in the instructions which she gives her priests; and the priests, who are taught to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has left them in his place, as presidents and judges in the court of conscience, are only carrying out their system in its legitimate results, when they institute the inquiries to which I have alluded. I ask my reader to judge of the tree by its fruits.

Further; no matter how abominable the conduct or character of the priest may be, though he be the most flagitious of men, the Council of Trent teaches that he still exercises the function of forgiving sins! The language of that decree is, "Even those priests, who are living in mortal sin, exercise the function of forgiving sins, as the ministers of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit conferred upon them in ordination; and those who contend that wicked priests have not this

power, hold very erroneous sentiments." (Con. Trid. Sess. p. 14.)

It would be a difficult matter to find another paragraph any where except in Romish books, more completely saturated with blasphemy than this quotation from the decrees of the Council of Trent.

The following questions, to be answered at confession, are found in the Philadelphia edition of "The Key of Paradise," approved by the Roman prelate of this city, p. 115.

I. "Have you been guilty of adultery or fornication, and how often? 2. Have you desired to commit either, and how often? 3. Have you intended to commit either, and how often? 4. Have you taken pleasure in thinking on any improper subject, and how often? 5. Have you endeavoured to excite your own passions, and how often? 6. Have you been guilty of indecent liberties, and how often? 7. Have you read indecent writings, or

lent them to others, and how often? 8. Have you exposed indecent pictures? 9. Have you joined in indecent conversation, and how often? 10. Have you committed any gross sin against chastity?"

All Roman Catholic men and women, and boys and girls, above twelve years of age, must study all the above questions; and carefully and truly answer them to the priest, if he sees fit to ask them, or they cannot obtain absolution.

I have before me a form of examination in French, and another in Spanish; but, although they would be intelligible to but few of my readers, I shall not pollute my pages by transcribing them. Indeed, I feel as though I had gone to the utmost verge of propriety by consenting to transfer the passages from Dens' Theology with the preceding list, which is published in an authorized Roman Catholic book, in our own city. I shall not insult the understandings of my readers by attempting to *prove* the corrupt tendency of such ques-

tions, especially when propounded to *children.**

I am not surprised that a young Roman Catholic lady declared most solemnly, to a Protestant friend, a short time since, "I never will go to confession, and I told the priest so." I do not wonder that several Roman Catholic ladies, who were converted last winter, and connected themselves with a Baptist church in this city, have since expressed their amazement at their own blindness and stupidity in ever letting the priest put certain interrogatories to them more than once. One of them has declared, that frequently, after returning from "confession," she has spent the whole day in weeping tears of shame, on account of the impudent questions which were put to her, and which she honestly believed herself obliged to answer. Were it not for the perverting, soul-destroying influence of superstition, I

* See Confessions of a Catholic Priest, chap. 13.

am sure that modest people would never be found at the confessional.

But it is not only through corrupting questions and solicitations that injury is done to the souls of men and women; the doctrine of absolution is alike destructive to all morality and piety. Let a man, viciously disposed, be taught that a priest can absolve him from almost any crime to which his wicked heart is inclined, and what stronger temptation could you offer in order to make him riot in wickedness? If the case should even be beyond the jurisdiction of a priest, the bishop can probably grant a dispensation for money, and at the worst, the Pope can certainly do it; and is not the papist taught to believe that the Great Judge of all the earth has so far put the matter out of his own power, that he must confirm, in heaven, the judicial sentence which the priest, or bishop, or Pope, as the case may be, shall pass upon earth? What regard will such a man pay to the law of God? What will his

piety be worth? Will he not despise the doctrines which teach that the corrupt affections of the heart must be mortified, and that without holiness no man shall see the Lord?

The grossest abuses obtain in relation to absolution. There are some confessors who are called deaf, not because they *cannot*, but because they *will not* hear, and who never deny absolution, though the sins be referred to the Pope. Anthony Gavin speaks of them as follows:—

"One of such confessors has more business in Lent than twenty of the others, for he, (like our couple-beggars, who for sixpence do marry the people,) for the same sum gives absolution. And for this reason all the great and habitual sinners go to the *deaf confessor*, who gives, upon a bargain, a certificate, in which he says that such a one has fulfilled the commandment of the church, for every body is obliged to produce a certificate of confession to the minister of the parish before Easter, or

else he must be exposed to the church. So as it is a hard thing for any old sinner to get absolution, and a certificate from other covetous confessors, without a great deal of money, they generally go to the *deaf confessor.* I had a friend in the same convent, who told me, that such confessors were obliged to give two-thirds of their profit to the community, and there being only two *deaf confessors* in that convent, he assured me that in one Lent, they gave to the father prior 600 pistoles a-piece,"* &c.

2. *Auricular confession, as practised in the church of Rome, is destructive of civil and religious liberty.*

I make no scruple in asserting that this is the grand secret of the despotism that prevails, wherever popery is fairly established. The priest sits as "judge in the court of conscience," and the good papist, like a poor criminal, is arraigned at

* Master-key to Popery, p. 50.

his bar. He is taught to reverence his fellow-sinner as the representative of God, clothed with plenary power to bind or to loose at pleasure, to forgive all his sins, or to consign him to hell and damnation for ever! Can such a man stand erect as a freeman? Why, his spirit is crushed and broken,—he is a *slave!* If the priest imposes a penance, he must perform it, or endure it, as the case may be, or else incur the guilt of mortal sin! If he comes into a Protestant church to hear a sermon on auricular confession, or any other popish tenet, he will have to confess that sin to his priest, and wo betide him then. It is well for him that the offence was not committed in a papal country, and as it is, perhaps he may be compelled to go without his breakfast for two weeks, or wear a hair cloth next his skin, or be reminded in some other pleasant way of his misdemeanor, besides paying a smart fee before he can get absolution.

We hear a great deal said about slavery

in our day; and I abhor oppression in every shape; but I count the poor slave, who hoes his master's corn under the lash of a heartless overseer, a freeman, when compared with the man who breathes the atmosphere of liberty, and yet voluntarily fetters his soul, and surrenders himself, bound hand and foot, to the sovereign will and pleasure of a popish priest! I blush for my countrymen, when I think of such degradation! "The priest sits as judge in the court of conscience!" Can you acknowledge this claim, and yet call yourself a freeman? What, if the priest makes it a matter of conscience that you vote for a certain political candidate? Will you exercise the right, guarantied to you by the constitution of your country, of choosing for yourself? You cannot—you dare not contradict the priest, you must vote as his reverence directs. If the priest "sits as judge in the court of conscience," then your conscience is under his control, and if so, there is an end of

religious liberty, for this consists in the right of worshiping God according to the dictates of conscience. You have no right to surrender this privilege, and if you do, God will still hold you accountable for it.

But in reply to all this, Roman Catholics may be ready to say, Has not the confessional been often made the medium through which restitution of stolen property has been made? That such restitution has sometimes occurred, I most cheerfully admit: when of unusual importance, care has been taken to give due publicity to the fact. But the very principles which govern the priest and his penitent at the confessional, are enough to show that restitution does not necessarily follow the acknowledgment of theft. The priest is bound, under the most solemn oath, never to divulge the secrets with which he becomes acquainted at the confessional. Even if the intention to murder the highest officer of the government

were to be revealed under such circumstances, the priest dare not warn the party threatened of the impending danger, unless he can, by stratagem or otherwise, obtain the information elsewhere, from the same individual. It has often happened that Romish priests have been informed by their penitents of a murderous plan, which has subsequently been executed, but the secrecy of the confessional forbade them to give the least intimation to the victim of his danger. I have before me a pamphlet written by the Rev. L. J. Nolan, lately a Romish clergyman, but now a curate of the established church at Athboy, in Ireland, which contains the following statements, of the truth of which I have no doubt. He refers to two instances, which are precisely in point.

"The first is the case of a person who was barbarously murdered, and with whose intended assassination I became acquainted at confession. One of the five conspirators, (all of whom were sworn to

commit the horrid deed,) broached to me the bloody conspiracy in the confessional. I implored him to desist from his intention, of becoming an accomplice to so diabolical a design. But, alas! all advice was useless; no dissuasion could prevail, his determination was fixed—and his only reason for having disclosed the awful machination to his confessor, seemed to have originated from a hope, that his wicked design would be hallowed by his previous acknowledgment of it to his priest. Finding all my remonstrance unavailing, I then recurred to stratagem. I earnestly besought him to mention the circumstance to me out of the confessional, in order that I might apprise the intended victim of his danger, or caution the conspirators against the committal of so inhuman a deed. But here ingenuity itself failed, in arresting the career of his satanic obstinacy. The conspirator's illegal oath, and his apprehension of himself becoming the victim of brutal assassination, should he

be known as the revealer of the conspiracy, rendered him inflexible to my entreaties; and awful to relate—yes, awful, and the hand that now pens it shudders at the record it makes—a poor inoffensive man, the victim of slaughter, died a most cruel death by the hand of ruthless assassins. Oh, my dear Protestant countrymen, you will now naturally ask, whether am I, or the perpetrators of the bloody deed, most to be censured? I who knew the murderers and the murdered previous to the act,—I who had met the intended victim of slaughter in the public streets but a short time antecedent to his death. But, my friends, the prejudices of my early life in favour of the doctrine of auricular confession, and the influence of subsequent education, instilling into my mind the inviolability of that iniquitous tribunal, must plead before my God and the public, as my only apology for the concealment of the diabolical conspiracy.

"And now, you Romish priests, I ask

you, could the Lord Jesus institute a doctrine so monstrous in its practice, and so subversive of the principles of humanity? —a doctrine that beholds the dagger pointed at the human heart, but bushes the warning voice that would apprise the devoted victim of his danger? I must now proceed with the recital of another case more revolting to humanity, than even the former one. It is that of a female administering poison to her parent. Her first attempt at parricide proved ineffectual, owing to an immediate retching that seized the parent after taking the draught. The perpetrator of this foul deed afterward came to confession and acknowledged her guilt, but circumstances proved that she only sought for priestly absolution, to ease her mind and prepare her for a speedy repetition of the heinous crime. Again she attempted the act, and it proved successful. I was called on to attend the dying parent. The unnatural throes and convulsive agonies of the un-

fortunate man, convinced me that the disease was of no ordinary nature. The previous confession of his daughter, who at this time made her appearance, rushed upon my mind, and suggested that the parent was a second time poisoned. From what I had known through the confessional, I could not even hint at the propriety of sending for medical attendance; for the Romish doctrine impressed an inviolable secrecy upon my lips, and prevented my giving the slightest intimation of the malady; whilst the poor parent, unconscious of the cause of his death, died in the most excruciating agonies of which humanity can form a conception. Oh, my Roman Catholic countrymen, why not awaken from your lethargic slumbers —why not arise from the mystic spells that bind you, and cast off that unnatural yoke, which would dare to unite your God in an unholy alliance with such monkish blasphemy? Should any, unacquainted with Romanism, question the veracity

of these statements, let him consult history, and he will find many similar facts. Did not the Romish priest, the Rev. Mr. Garnet, the provincial of the Jesuits, justify his concealment of the gunpowder plot, on the pretext of its being revealed to him at confession? Did not Father D'Aubigny, the French Jesuit, put forward a similar plea of justification for concealment, when the assassin Ravaillac, (that stabbed Henry the IV.) in 1610, acknowledged to him in the confessional his plan of regicidal murder? But why need I refer to such circumstances, as every priest who has acted in the capacity of a confessor, must admit the fact of similar cases frequently coming before him at the confessional?"

I bless God, that our Roman Catholic brethren are beginning to open their eyes to the iniquities of the popish system, and that many of them are embracing the pure gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. My very soul has been

rejoiced to hear of two Roman Catholic priests in Ireland, of the name of Crotty, who, with their whole congregation, have publicly renounced popery. One of them is now a Presbyterian minister in connexion with the synod of Ulster, having charge of the same congregation whom he had served, or rather ruled, whilst a Roman Catholic priest; the other has attached himself to the Methodist church.

Do you ask how this conversion was effected? I will tell you. They and their congregation became interested in the examination of the great Protestant doctrines, and like the noble Bereans of old, searched the Scriptures to see whether these things were so. "They proved all things, and held fast that which is good." When did you ever hear of a well authenticated case of a Protestant renouncing his faith, in consequence of reading the Bible, with humble prayer to God for the light of his Spirit? And when was it

ever known that a whole congregation, with their minister at their head, abjured the *Protestant* faith, as the result of a prayerful investigation of God's word? Were such a phenomenon to occur, it would indeed be a new thing under the sun.

These are not the only recent cases of conversion from Popery. The following extract from "the Limerick Chronicle, (Ireland,) appeared in the 'Church Record,' of January 9, 1841," published at Flushing, N. Y.

"*Interesting Scene.*—Monday last, the Bishop of Limerick, accompanied by his chaplain, the Rev. A. Denny, Rector of Tralee, attended Divine service at Ventry. The congregation, with the exception of several visiters from England, was entirely converts from the Church of Rome, in number 250. The service was performed and the sermon preached in the Irish language, by the Rev. Thomas Moriarty, himself a convert and minister

of the congregation, exhorting them to stand fast in the truth of the gospel, and by purity of life and conversation to manifest the sincerity of their profession. He expressed himself highly gratified with the evident reality of this important work, and particularly with the answering of the children in the Sabbath-school. In the evening, his lordship preached in his usual impressive style to a crowded congregation in Dingle, including more than one hundred converts, inhabitants of the town."

I am persuaded, that if all men would imitate the Bereans, whom the apostle so highly commends, the word of God would speedily overturn the strongest bulwarks of the Man of Sin. That day will come ere long; you and I may not live to see it, but the signs of the times, and the voice of prophecy combine to assure us, that it is near at hand. Babylon shall be judged; the mother of the abominations of the earth shall perish in her own craftiness.

Yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come. Yet a little while, and the angel testifies to the churches, "Come out of her my people, and be ye not partakers of her sins, lest ye receive also of her plagues."

THE END.